



A Common Story

Ivan Goncharov (1812 - 1891)
translated by Constance Garnett

Alexander Fedoritch Adouev is the naïve, pampered son of Anna Pavlovna, a provincial landowner. He decides to go off to Saint Petersburg, not only to make his mark on society but also to fulfill his two romantic dreams of becoming a great writer and finding a great love. He is taken under the reluctant wing of his uncle, Piotr Ivanitch Adouev, a pragmatic, hard-headed businessman who scorns everything romantic and tries to cure Alexander Fedoritch of his sentimental, youthful illusions. The younger Adouev resists the indoctrinations of the elder, writing prosaic articles about manure and crop rotation for an agricultural journal as a way of supporting himself but spending his nights writing passionate works of poetry and drama. In quest of True Love, he pursues in turn the rustic Sophia, the perfidious Nadinka, the melancholy Julia, the sprightly Liza, and even (implicitly) the wise and beautiful Lizaveta, who has entered into a loveless marriage with Alexander's own unsentimental uncle. The great question throughout the novel is whether Alexander can make a life balanced between pragmatism and romanticism, or be sacrificed to one or the other. Not a "superfluous man" in the same sense as Gontcharov's later famous protagonist Oblomov, Alexander Fedoritch Adouev remains a noteworthy creation, a sympathetic, three-dimensional character in the early years of Russian realism.



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Read by Expatriate

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